

60-mile East Coast Mini-loop – Paul Durbin

For a few months each summer *Thrift* (96) lives on her trailer in the boatyard of Colin Buttifant in Ludham, Norfolk. This means I can sail on the Broads and just buy a short visit licence for each of the few weeks that I come up here. In early September I make one phone call to Colin and I arrive after a two-hour drive from Hertford with grandson Andrew to find Colin has already launched *Thrift* and we are ready to go. Andrew is a veteran of these mad trips with granddad, having started when he was 10 years old in 2007.

The first time Colin tried to recover *Thrift* on her road trailer, he said I really must fit some side bars on the trailer to guide the hull in to the centre. The water is not clear round here, and the bits of the trailer that are under water are completely invisible. Side bars are now fitted to the trailer and he finds recovery is now no trouble.



Thurne Dyke courtesy Tournorfolk.co.uk

First stop on our round trip from Ludham via Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth was Thurne Dyke and dinner in the Lion Inn – hugely improved and under new management. Leisurely start at 10:30am and non-stop to mooring at Stracey Arms at 12:45, motoring under Acle bridge with the mast down. Then pulled it straight up again without stopping.

Provisioned up at the little shop at Stracey Arms and were off mooring at 3:50pm with a spring tide taking us to Great Yarmouth Yacht Station to arrive at Breydon Water at exactly on slack water. Through the bridges and then lifted the mast up and sailed up Breydon Water on a nice easy beat with the tide helping us on our way. Wind SW 12 -15 mph. Moor up at Bernie Arms at 7:50pm, and had a well deserved meal, and a quiet night's sleep. Felt really superior to a very classy looking yacht that took ages to raise their mast whilst moored up by Breydon Bridge.

The place was unrecognisable in the morning with the spring tide almost at full height. Gybed straight off the mooring, the river being just wide enough to turn.

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Then round into the River Waveney and into a really cracking sail, mostly on a beam reach in 15-18mph westerly wind, bright sunshine and with a following tide. No wonder a cheery chap in Goodchild Marine called out ‘mind you don’t break the speed limit’. He might have had a point as it was 6mph on this stretch of the river.

Having thought I had mastered the tricky art of deploying the jib from furled, I found that twice on this leg of the journey the line jumped off the pulley and of course then it is completely jammed. So we moor up and untangle the line and get going again. It had happened before in a stiff breeze in the Solent, where there was no chance of a handy mooring. The only way of getting the jib down that I could think of was to drop the jib from the head of the sail, but that involved putting a nice smooth curve in the furling spar – took a struggle to get it almost straight again.



*Yacht Station, Oulton Broad,
courtesy Broadland Memories*

However, in what seemed like no time at all we were moored up at the yacht station at Oulton Broad, having been guided to a quiet berth by the harbour master. And then hot showers with as much water as we could have wanted!

Then Andrew spotted that a film he really wanted to see was showing at Lowestoft. So

I thought the exercise would do us good so off we went on foot. The exercise was good but not sure about the film – *The Dark Tower*.

Somewhere along the way we (I mean Andrew) noticed that instead of sailing back the way we had come, it was actually shorter to go back by sea from Lowestoft to Great Yarmouth and then back into the Broads.

So first thing next day I’m off by train to Lowestoft to a fantastic shop where they stocked all the charts you could wish for. I went for the Admiralty pack which is the type I am most familiar with. Day Skipper and Yachtmaster theory I hoped would come slowly back.

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The trip from Oulton Broad to the sea involved negotiating Mutford Lock, a footbridge, a railway bridge and a road bridge. But for the princely sum of £13 the Harbour Master arranged it all. This time however the bridges opened for us, and what terrifyingly massive structures they are. You could feel the glare of resentment from the traffic jam, all created by allowing such a tiny boat to hold up the rush-hour traffic. I hope no one noticed we could have dropped the mast and not bothered them, although I did not really fancy raising the mast as we emerged into the sea.

What an eye opener was the trip along the river to Lowestoft. This must be the Suffolk ‘rust belt’, with abandoned rusty and sunk commercial vessels all through Lake Lothing. Not to mention the derelict factories, jetties and warehouses adorning the shore.



So we're through the last bridge and straight out to sea, and what a shock compared with the placid waters of the Broads. Waves were probably much less than a meter high but they did toss the boat around and we later confessed to each other that we wondered at this point if we were doing the right thing. But the tide was in our favour up the coast and 15-18 mph of wind on a broad reach took us to the mouth of the river at Gorleston in only about 1½ hours.

Inconveniently, this was about an hour before slack water. All the water in the Broads was of course draining out into the sea at this point so there was a steady flow against us with a long swell running. A long motor was in prospect. Not to worry I thought - it will be slack in an hour and then it would turn in our favour.

What a contrast with Lowestoft was this river scene all the way to from Gorleston to Great Yarmouth. New shiny ships of all descriptions were moored up and manoeuvring in and out of the river, presumably doing good business servicing the offshore oil and wind-farm facilities.

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So we faced a steady plod under motor against the spring tide to Great Yarmouth Yacht Station, arriving an hour later having dropped the mast and raised it again for the three intervening bridges. Strangely the tide was still against us. An overnight mooring at the yacht station did not much appeal to us so we decided to press on towards the Stracey Arms. I thought we had about another 1½ hours before it got dark. However, then the rain set in and it got really dark. We were puzzled by a sort of faint pale green illumination that was following us on the reeds and bushes on the right hand bank of the river. Then it dawned on me that that was the ghostly glow from the starboard navigation light. It took our minds off the rain for a little while. We finally arrived at the Arms to moor up in pitch blackness with a wet and slippery bank to jump on to.

Strangely the tide had still not turned. It felt very much as if the tide was being particularly awkward to us and punishing us for staying out so late. But of course if I had a moment to think clearly I would have realised the time of slack water gets later as you go further inland away from the sea. So as we motored inland all we were doing was staying just ahead of the time when the tide would turn and we would have never reached a point where the tide turned in our favour. I shall know next time.

Paul Durbin - *Thrift* (96)



Quieter days on Thrift